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Chairman: Ms. Seanedzu (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Ghana)

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08-53600 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Majoor (Netherlands), Ms. Seanedzu (Ghana), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 55: Social development (*continued*)

(a) Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (*continued*) (A/63/133)

(b) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/63/183 and A/63/184)

(c) Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing (*continued*) (A/63/95)

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(e) Review and appraisal of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (*continued*) (A/63/183)

1. **Ms. Rovirosa** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the Group attached the utmost importance to the question of full employment and decent work for all. She thanked the Secretary-General for his report (A/63/133), which included valuable recommendations for States, the international community and the United Nations system. She welcomed the Secretary-General's efforts towards mainstreaming the topic into all of the Organization's work. Despite positive economic indicators, growth in the Rio Group countries had not created enough decent jobs. Trade barriers, unfair trading practices, the global economic situation and the international trading system continued to have a negative impact. A firm political will would be needed in order to achieve full employment and decent work for all, an aim that should be placed at the core of the relevant strategies. The Rio Group countries had therefore established programmes and strategies promoting employment, social development and the protection of vulnerable groups.

2. Food security and the crisis resulting from the unprecedented rise in food prices were of the utmost concern. More than ever, priority must be given to the rural and agricultural sector, which accounted for a significant share of total employment in the Rio Group countries. The attainment of full employment and decent work for all, and in particular the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises, would require international cooperation in the form of developed countries' honouring of their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of their GDP to official development assistance, South-South cooperation, technical cooperation and the exchange of good practices.

3. The Secretary-General's report stressed that women, indigenous peoples, young, ageing or disabled persons and migrant workers were often excluded from the job market and became the victims of discrimination. The recent adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities should encourage the full and equal participation of persons in those categories. The Rio Group welcomed the fact that a majority of its members had already acceded to the Convention. However, many young persons in Latin America and the Caribbean could not find decent work. In order to remedy the situation, it was vital that they receive an education tailored to their needs. Moreover, development strategies needed to take into consideration the ageing of the population. Measures addressing the specific needs of youth and older persons would contribute directly to resolving the crisis affecting social security systems in many countries.

4. Discrimination against women in the workplace had a high social and economic cost. The countries of the Rio Group were aware that such segregation was unacceptable, and they remained determined to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. It was crucial to ensure that the rights of migrants were fully respected and that they enjoyed decent and safe working conditions, they contributed as much to their home countries as to their receiving countries.

5. The multi-dimensional nature of poverty required innovative and integrated strategies to assist all States in attaining the internationally agreed development goals, in particular the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), something that could be achieved only if the international community showed determination.

6. **Ms. Kreibich** (Germany) said that, as in previous years, her delegation was honoured to include two youth delegates, who would speak on behalf of young Germans.

7. **Ms. Schrader** (Germany) said that the youth delegates had travelled across their country to talk with young people, in schools and at conferences and other events, in order to understand their hopes, concerns and visions in the light of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. Young people saw education as the decisive force in breaking out of poverty. They refused to accept unemployment, illiteracy and the waste of resources, and called upon Governments to increase their investments.

8. Education had been recognized as a human right by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Millennium Development Goals and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, if efforts to promote it were not substantially increased, many countries would fail to ensure universal primary education, and only a few would achieve gender equality in primary and secondary education, the two Millennium Development Goals that had seen the least progress. The ability to educate youth would determine each country's contribution to the global community; each euro invested in education had a social return on investment of 120 per cent. Education should unlock one of the world's most powerful resources, whether they be young Europeans, whose numbers would shrink by 25 per cent by 2050, or young Africans, who would have the task of leading their countries out of conflict, poverty and hunger.

9. Young persons wished to see greater recognition of the value of non-formal education systems. In many developing countries, such systems represented the only access to education. Non-formal education providers, many of them youth organizations, should receive more than the limited support that they currently enjoyed.

10. **Mr. Klein** (Germany) said that over half of the world's population were less than 25 years old. Young persons wanted to be included in political decision-making. They wanted not only to be the subject of decisions but also to be key agents in their implementation. The status of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals was of great concern to young people. To see the Goals as a mere statement of good will would be one of the greatest possible mistakes. Young persons called upon all Governments to contribute to their realization.

11. Including youth in the political system at an early stage in their lives and in an age-appropriate manner would help nurture a sense of ownership and identification and, in the long term, help strengthen the legitimacy of political institutions. Around the world, young volunteers and youth organizations were already contributing greatly to social development through international student exchanges and peer-to-peer education programmes in Africa, and by tackling issues such as juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, racism and sexual health. Youth organizations should therefore receive greater administrative and financial support.

12. Young people also felt that taking an active part in society meant more than simply volunteering; they wanted to be fully able to shape the future of their communities. However, their participation could provide the maximum benefit only if they were fully informed of the rights and means at their disposal, if the mechanisms of participation were attractive to them and if the results were transparent.

13. In conclusion, young people called upon Member States to recognize the value of informal education by supporting youth organizations; ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child; promoting youth input in the planning, evaluation and implementation of decisions affecting them; and supporting youth participation at the United Nations by including young people in all Member State delegations.

14. **Ms. Kurosaki** (Japan) said that social development was a relatively new concept, the importance of which had been recognized by the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. At the Summit, there had been a comprehensive discussion of three priority areas: the eradication of poverty; support for full and productive employment; and the promotion of social integration, the latter being the priority theme of the Commission for Social Development for 2009-2010. Over 10 years after the Summit, social integration remained a challenge in many societies, owing to their poverty. Without the support of the international community, it might be difficult for the least developed countries to make advances in social integration. Japan had been active, at both national and international level, in contributing to the enhancement of social integration.

15. The promotion of a "society for all", in which every individual and group could participate, involved

also the promotion of a "society for all ages", guaranteeing the full integration of older people and their continued involvement in society. As a rapidly ageing society, in which 21.5 per cent of the population was over 65, Japan had taken measures to deal with the situation. For example, it had prohibited age limits on recruitment and established a stronger social welfare and health-care system to address the special needs of older people. It also sought to enhance the independence and social participation of people with disabilities by means of comprehensive measures implemented under the country's 10-year programmes since 1983. In September 2007, Japan had signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Government was also promoting awareness of infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and leprosy, in order to eliminate prejudice and discrimination against people affected by those diseases.

16. Japan provided official development assistance (ODA) both bilaterally and through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, having regard to such social development issues as income disparity, gender discrimination, human rights, democratization and environmental considerations in each recipient country.

17. Her delegation would be submitting a draft resolution jointly with Brazil entitled "Follow-up to the implementation of the International Year of Volunteers". She hoped that all States would become sponsors of the draft resolution.

18. **Ms. Maierá** (Brazil) said that her delegation fully associated itself with the views expressed by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group. It reaffirmed its support for the commitments undertaken at the World Summit for Social Development and the subsequent special session of the General Assembly. Those commitments were particularly relevant at a time when a serious economic and financial crisis threatened the living conditions of all, especially those of the most vulnerable people.

19. Her Government was implementing social development policies that had served as a model for African and other South American countries. Since 2003, almost 10 million jobs had been created, nine million people had been brought out of poverty and another 20 million had moved up into the middle class. The "Bolsa Familia" programme provided grants for schooling and health care for children and retraining for adults, while other initiatives had been launched to increase school attendance and eradicate child malnutrition.

20. Brazil also supported all initiatives aimed at strengthening and developing the protection of everyone over 60. His delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing (A/63/95) and, in particular, its recommendation that Member States should request him to submit a report to the General Assembly in 2009 specifically relating to the rights of older persons. In December 2007, Brazil had hosted the Second Regional Intergovernmental Conference on Ageing, which had aimed to follow up, at regional level, the commitments of the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The Conference had adopted the Brasilia Declaration, which had reaffirmed the participants' commitment to spare no effort in promoting and protecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all older persons, eradicating all forms of discrimination and violence against them and creating networks for their protection in order to ensure the effective exercise of their rights.

21. Lastly, with regard to volunteerism, the Government had been working with the United Nations Volunteers in the implementation of several projects, especially those aimed at the realization of the Millennium Development Goals. There were more volunteers in Brazil than in almost any other developing country. In view of the importance it had attached to the issue, her delegation would be submitting a draft resolution, jointly with the delegation of Japan, entitled "Follow-up to the implementation of the International Year of Volunteers".

22. **Mr. Saeed** (Sudan) said that his delegation aligned itself with the statement by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The World Summit for Social Development had laid the foundations for a comprehensive examination of three basic issues, namely poverty reduction and eradication, the promotion of employment and the consolidation of social integration.

23. The Sudanese economy had grown very fast over recent years, thus benefiting Government programmes to combat poverty and assist vulnerable groups. A

national programme launched in 2001 made provision for free emergency hospital care, a reduction in school fees, financial assistance for students and infrastructure development. The State had also taken steps to promote youth employment.

24. To deal with the global food crisis, the Sudan had decided to make full use of the country's extensive agricultural resources and set up a programme in 2008 to boost the agriculture sector, by extending the acreage of land under cultivation and diversifying crops. Partnerships had also been formed with other countries.

25. The Sudan had signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which had been adopted by the Council of Ministers and submitted to Parliament for ratification. The Minister of Social Welfare, Women and Children's Affairs had adopted measures to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, in accordance with the Convention, and set up special programmes for older persons and youth, including programmes to promote their rights and their participation in society.

26. The Sudan's achievements in the field of social development still fell short of the goals set out at the World Conference for Social Development. It was therefore essential to enhance international coordination and cooperation, strengthen national capacities within the framework of productive partnerships and ensure increased development assistance from donor countries. Another priority must be the total elimination of foreign debt, which was a hindrance to development projects undertaken by the poor countries and undermined their stability.

27. **Ms. Halpern** (United States of America) noted with satisfaction the cautious optimism expressed by the Director-General of UNESCO in his report on the implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade transmitted by the Secretary-General (A/63/172) with regard to the progress made in youth and adult literacy rates. According to the latest figures, the world literacy rate among those aged between 15 and 24 had risen from 87 per cent to 89 per cent in the past decade. The report also noted, however, that there were still 774 million non-literate young people and adults in the world, the majority of whom were women. Much remained to be done. Her delegation urged UNESCO to encourage other multilateral organizations to make a greater commitment to the promotion of literacy and to define more clearly the important link between literacy and other areas of development, such as health and employment. It also challenged UNESCO to measure the effects of those links in order to help the international community take stronger action to eradicate illiteracy.

28. Much had been done for literacy by the First Lady of the United States, Laura Bush. As Honorary Ambassador to the United Nations Literacy Decade, she had recently announced the establishment of the United Nations Literacy Decade Fund to Advance Global Literacy, which would support literacy efforts, assessment and best practices in the countries targeted by the UNESCO Literacy Initiative for Empowerment, 2005-2015. The Fund would be sustained by contributions from foundations, corporations and Governments, beginning with the United States, which would contribute US$ 2 million. Helping the hundreds of millions of illiterate men and women learn to read was a moral obligation and one of the greatest challenges of the age.

29. **Ms. Jahan** (Bangladesh) said that her country associated itself with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Referring to some of the important issues for the least developed countries and citing the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/133), she expressed disappointment that, in most countries, economic growth remained insufficient to create decent jobs while, in others, higher growth rates had not translated into the generation of better and more productive jobs, especially for the poor; moreover, trade barriers and unfair trading practices hindered job creation in developing countries. The least developed countries needed adequate assistance and special treatment to be able to generate more employment opportunities at home and abroad. It was therefore encouraging that the United Nations system and the international financial institutions were placing more emphasis on employment issues.

30. Bangladesh remained fully committed to the objectives defined at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development and the Millennium Development Goals, particularly those relating to full and productive employment. With regard to social development, it had joined the ranks of medium human development countries on the Human Development Index. Bangladesh had also become a party to the Convention

on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, and its provisions were fully reflected in all the country's policies and activities, as demonstrated particularly by the adoption of the Disability Welfare Rules in 2008, the establishment of a quota in all Government jobs for people with disabilities, and the introduction of microcredit programmes.

31. Unemployment among young people was a matter of major concern, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/133), and in order to integrate young people into community development and socio-economic activities, her Government had adopted a national youth policy and other programmes targeting employment; moreover, cash-for-education programmes had increased school enrolment and attendance. Bangladesh needed to join the Youth Employment Network and to share the best practices of the lead countries to develop and implement strategies to help young people find decent and productive work.

32. Keeping older people in the labour force according to their capacities and preference required dynamic policies. Bangladesh ensured protection for the fundamental freedoms, human rights and welfare of its elderly population of five million and had introduced pension and micro-loan schemes, in line with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. It was also conducting awareness-raising campaigns on the situation of older persons, had supported all United Nations initiatives concerning the family and had taken innovative measures aimed, in particular, at the poor and at rural women who often provided the only financial support for their family.

33. The poor had been the hardest hit by the current global food crisis, and it was imperative to increase agricultural productivity, promote agricultural development and invest more in research and technology transfer. To attenuate the effects of the crisis, the expansion of basic social protection should be made an integral part of development plans and poverty reduction strategies in developing countries, and the goal of full and decent employment should be made the central objective of macroeconomic planning and reforms. The free movement of labour was also essential to the development of many of the least developed countries and her delegation hoped that the necessary political will would converge with an effective partnership between national efforts and international material support.

34. **Ms. Blum** (Colombia) said that her delegation associated itself with the statements made by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group; it also shared the opinion expressed in the Secretary-General's report (A/63/133) that, to reduce poverty and promote social integration, it was critical to focus on expanding employment and decent work opportunities.

35. Colombia accorded a fundamental importance in its development programmes to building a society that was more equitable and open for all. Job creation and economic recovery measures played an essential role in its actions. Among other encouraging results of the economic policy, the unemployment rate had decreased from 20 per cent in 2000 to 11.2 per cent in 2008, the minimum salary had increased by 8 per cent in five years and exceeded the rate of inflation, gross domestic product (GDP) had grown by 6.8 per cent in 2006 and the proportion of those living in poverty had declined from 56 per cent in 2002 to 45 per cent in 2006. To combat poverty and inequality more effectively, her Government had created mechanisms to facilitate the access of the poorest and most vulnerable groups to goods and services that would satisfy their most basic needs and generate sustainable income, and actions had been taken in favour of young people, women, the disabled, and displaced and demobilized persons.

36. Her Government had increased the number of workers covered by social security by 40 per cent and, by the end of 2006, almost 38 million Colombians had health insurance, funded by the State in more than half the cases; the goal was to expand social service coverage to the whole population by 2010. Her Government had also launched a microcredit programme, which had made 1.9 million loans to poor families and small and medium-sized enterprises in 2007, and in 2006 the State had financed 4.1 million study grants in the context of human resource development.

37. Development was not only synonymous with accelerated economic growth, but also involved the equitable distribution of wealth. Nevertheless, the growth of the global economy had not created better or more productive jobs for the poorest. The United Nations system should undertake coherent actions to promote national policies and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; international cooperation was an essential factor in that regard.

38. **Mr. Amorós Nuñez** (Cuba) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and recalled the commitments made by world leaders at the World Summit for Social Development. His delegation was disappointed to observe that its pessimism at the time was justified; nowadays injustice and inequality were more prevalent throughout the world than in 1995. The commitments made at the Summit would never be fulfilled, because egoism, injustice and the hegemonic pretensions, inequalities, waste and consumerism of an affluent minority continued to expand. Currently, 1.4 billion people lived on less than one dollar a day, 925 million people suffered from hunger and the global food crisis was only worsening the situation. Without political will, the situation would not change, and 80 per cent of the global population would remain excluded.

39. Regarding the commitment to achieve the goal of full employment, his delegation regretted that, owing to the inequitable international circumstances imposed by the most powerful countries, more than 1.5 billion of the global population of working age were unemployed or underemployed, most of them in the developing countries; 80 per cent of the world's population did not have adequate social protection and 50 per cent had none at all. To end that situation, wealthy countries should honour their commitments concerning official development assistance, and developing countries should not be held back by their external debt burden.

40. Regretting the failure of the Doha Round, his delegation considered that there could be no progress while powerful countries spent more than US$ 250 billion on agricultural subsidies, thereby squandering US$ 3 a day on their cattle, while more than one sixth of humanity survived on less than a dollar a day. Those who defended neoliberalism at all costs were currently promoting ambitious Government interventions in their financial systems even though, in the past, they had dissuaded developing countries from following such a policy.

41. The embargo imposed by the United States of America on Cuba was the principal obstacle to its development and had been maintained despite the two hurricanes that had devastated the country. Cuba had made progress in terms of social development, and the whole population had access to health services and free education; life expectancy was more than 77 years of age, and school enrolment was 100 per cent at the primary level and 99 per cent at the secondary level. More than two thirds of the national budget was invested in areas such as education, health, social security and benefits and scientific research. Moreover, in the context of international cooperation, more than 270,000 Cubans had taken part in social development activities in 154 countries since 1961, and the Cuban study grant programme for students from developing countries had enabled 23,000 foreigners to study medicine in Cuba. Lastly, he said it was necessary to put an end to egoism and empty promises in order to create a world that was more equitable and better for all.

42. **Ms. Banna** (Iraq) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and recalled the importance of social development. Iraq was attempting to ensure the same rights to all its citizens and to take collective measures to re-establish stable development, which had been undermined by constant conflicts and economic sanctions. Security problems, associated with the high unemployment rate and the brain drain, had adversely affected development programmes, and the whole international community, rather than Iraq itself, bore the responsibility.

43. Nonetheless, her Government was making a considerable effort to reduce poverty, especially by offering more jobs and increasing salaries in the public sector. Projects had been launched to help the poor, the disabled and the elderly, and to boost the agricultural sector. The health sector had also received significant attention, as indicated by the creation of 300 health centres and the rebuilding of 37 hospitals. The Government saw education as a priority: it had increased the budget for education and training by 5 per cent and had already built 700 of the 4,000 schools projected to be completed by the end of 2008. The literacy rate of the 15 to 24 age group had risen despite the very difficult economic and social situation. Her Government had made an effort to boost oil exports to 3.5 million barrels a day to increase its domestic income, as reflected in the current budget. Inflation had been reduced to 24 per cent in 2003 and 16 per cent in 2007, and that policy had led to the adoption of the highest budget in the country's history: US$ 47 billion.

44. Iraq counted on the unreserved support of the international community, the United Nations and other

international organizations, in the context of the international pact for Iraq, to allow it to recover its place in the region and in the world.

45. **Mr. Abdelaziz** (Egypt) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. For the second consecutive year, the focus was on full employment and decent work for all, yet international indicators showed that, despite an increase of 3.8 per cent in global GDP, unemployment had increased sharply, particularly in developing countries, where 89 per cent of the world's labour force lived, and in Africa, which had the highest unemployment rates. Those figures might double under the impact of the financial crises gripping the world, which made it particularly urgent to establish comprehensive strategies, not only to assess the job losses caused by the financial crisis and the global food, energy and climate crises, but also to respond rapidly at the national and international levels.

46. At the international level, the failure of the Doha round of trade negotiations must be addressed, firstly by increasing foreign direct investment, streamlining tax policies, developing labour markets and adopting policies on migration, and secondly by promoting cooperation, in particular official development assistance. He welcomed, in that connection, the convening of the two high-level meetings on Africa's development needs and the Millennium Development Goals.

47. At the national level, social welfare systems must be strengthened to protect ordinary citizens from the effects — especially transboundary effects — of the crisis. That called for development policies that would increase production, empower youth and, in a comprehensive manner, increase their capabilities as human resources through strong health care and social systems.

48. His Government had made efforts to alleviate unemployment through policies on education and training. It had accomplished much with regard to gender equality and support for small businesses and partnerships between the public and private sectors, as part of an ambitious plan of political, economic and social reform, and would continue those efforts with the help of the international community.

49. The Secretary-General should assess the early impacts of the current crisis on social development, with special emphasis on the goal of full employment and decent work for all, and should provide recommendations to be presented at the next session of the Commission for Social Development .

50. **Mr. Rachkov** (Belarus) said that social development, one of the pillars of United Nations activity, had become especially important in the light of the current crisis. Belarus was improving its population's standard of living and was vigorously combating poverty: in 2007, the number of disadvantaged persons had decreased from 11.1 per cent to 7.7 per cent and the ratio between the highest and lowest salaries was only 6 to 1. Raising the employment rate was a key element of social development. Belarus had one of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe, at less than 1 per cent. The most vulnerable groups (large families, young people, the disabled and the unemployed) were protected, and substantial social welfare assistance was available.

51. Pensioners currently made up 26 per cent of the population, while 11 per cent of GDP was expended on pension benefits. His Government had therefore decided to increase retirement benefits and to protect pension payments to citizens living in neighbouring countries. It had also built a solid network of health-care institutions and homes for the elderly and disabled, and spent 6 per cent of GDP on education. Urban and rural youth had equal access to education and paid no fees for secondary or post-secondary studies.

52. His Government hoped that the United Nations would increase its social development capacities by enhancing the role of the Economic and Social Council, which coordinated the implementation of United Nations decisions in that area.

53. **Mr. Alhabib** (Iran) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Noting that the goals established at the World Summit for Social Development had not been attained, he said that inequalities had increased in many parts of the world and that young people faced a difficult future.

54. In view of the figures on unemployment and underemployment worldwide, efforts to generate full employment and decent work must transcend national policies. Their success would depend on the promotion

of a macroeconomic environment in which integrated, coherent policies were implemented. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report (A/63/133), achieving the goal of decent work for all would require closer international cooperation, through debt relief and official development assistance, and greater coherence in trade, aid, economic and social policies.

55. His country was committed to achieving the goals set at the World Summit: it had developed policies to promote social development and had taken concrete action in the areas of health, social security, employment, education and poverty reduction in the hope of creating a better life for current and future generations.

56. **Ms. Berrah** (Algeria) said that her delegation agreed with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Emphasizing that, in order to achieve social development, the vicious cycle of unemployment and poverty must be broken, and that decent work was the key to doing so, she said that her Government had made job creation a priority and had taken measures to upgrade skills, create small and medium-sized businesses, and promote equality of job opportunities.

57. The efforts being made by Algeria and many other developing countries could not succeed without active international solidarity and sincere partnership between developed and developing countries, and her Government reiterated its dedication to the Copenhagen commitments and to the Millennium Development Goals.

58. **Mr. Phaovibul** (Thailand), representing the young people of Thailand, reported that as a result of the adoption of the Fifth National Youth Plan and the Long-Term Strategy (2002-2011) in accordance with the United Nations action plan to create a world fit for children, major progress had been made on improving the access of both boys and girls to primary and secondary education. Thailand thus hoped to fulfil the goals relating to education for all by 2015. Thailand was also striving to instil in its young people an awareness of the need to protect the environment and natural resources, to avoid waste and to make appropriate use of knowledge and technology. To that end his Government was carrying out various activities, notably in collaboration with UNESCO, to make young people aware of the problems of global warming and its effects on society.

59. **Ms. Ma** (Thailand), also speaking on behalf of the youth of her country, reported that after including representatives of the National Youth Council as members of the National Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Thai authorities had presented a report that took into account the real situation and needs of children. She encouraged other Member States to do likewise. Thailand also intended to apply the Durban Programme of Action, protect the rights of all persons belonging to different faiths and religions and encourage tolerance and non-discrimination, for example by organizing interfaith youth camps.

60. Member States must establish strong policies in favour of young people, in order to offer them sound views in a world of unprecedented possibilities and risks.

61. **Mr. Davide** (Philippines) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and that he wished to speak on agenda items 55 (b) and (e). Ten per cent of the world's population were disabled, and 80 per cent of them lived in the developing world. His Government was very committed at the national level, to improving the lives of persons with disabilities and to providing them with equal opportunities to become active and productive members of society. After briefly describing the legal framework guaranteeing the protection of persons with disabilities, together with the related work of the National Council on Disability Affairs, he said that the Philippines was a party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and that the implementation of that instrument, together with the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, was essential to improving the lives of persons with disabilities, especially in the developing countries.

62. Despite the international community's efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, which were reviewed in the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/183), his delegation was concerned that strategies being applied to that end might not have much impact on persons with disabilities, since they were the least likely to benefit from conventional development plans and policies. A conscious effort must be made to mainstream the issue of persons with disabilities in MDG strategies. Cooperation among all nations in the development field and the sharing of

knowledge and technologies needed to be strengthened. The World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons was an important tool in the international disability architecture, helping to improve the situation of a large segment of society whose development and inclusion would lead to positive gains for humankind as a whole.

63. **Mr. Bui The Giang** (Viet Nam) said that his delegation aligned itself with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Viet Nam's socio-economic development strategy, designed in collaboration with many international partners, in particular United Nations agencies, comprised 12 national goals based on the Millennium Development Goals. Concrete policies put in place for the benefit of vulnerable groups had resulted in sustained economic growth, a sharp decrease in poverty, a reduction in maternal and child mortality, an enhanced role for women in the employment market and in decision-making and broader participation of ethnic minorities in society.

64. In close cooperation with the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and many other donors, Viet Nam was working to guarantee education for all, on the basis of a national strategy aimed at reforming curricula and teaching methods, recruiting qualified teachers, building new schools, promoting international cooperation, and more. Between 2001 and 2007, the education portion of total national expenditures had increased by an average of 21.3 per cent per annum, while national budget revenues had grown by only 14.8 per cent in the same period. Preschool enrolment had increased by 24 per cent between 2000 and 2006; the enrolment rates were some 96 per cent for lower secondary education and 73.6 per cent for upper secondary education; and the adult literacy rate had reached 94 per cent in 2007. Also, Viet Nam's Human Development Index was relatively high as compared to its per capita GDP.

65. Equity was an essential component of the national education policy. As a result, 86,000 students from ethnic minorities were currently enrolled in 280 boarding schools. A project intended to provide access to primary education for disadvantaged children, under way since 2003 in cooperation with the World Bank and other donors, had resulted in an unprecedented increase in the school completion rate among disadvantaged children, especially in the most vulnerable groups, and in access to schooling for more than 90 per cent of children with disabilities. It was time to move on from education for all to quality education for all.

66. **Mr. Rahman** (Malaysia), making reference to the food security and financial crisis, said that the time had come to redouble efforts to ensure observance of the principles laid down at the World Summit for Social Development, especially with regard to international cooperation and the transfer of technology and expertise, as well as to strive for fulfilment of the agreed targets for official development assistance. Additionally, the international financial and economic sectors had to be reformed to ensure that they were fair and equitable and allowed for a satisfactory balance between the roles of the public and private sectors, respectively, by adopting regulations and market-driven approaches. It was also essential to avoid ambiguities in the language of General Assembly resolutions focused on vulnerable groups and to show determination and sincerity in that regard. The international community could not wait for the full effects of the current financial, food and fuel crises to come to bear before taking action. His delegation called on the relevant entities of the United Nations system to provide Member States with a preliminary assessment of the impact of the crises.

67. Turning to the youth question, he said that Malaysia's National Youth Development Policy, formulated in 1985 and revised in 1997, focused on major areas such as employment, human resource development, empowerment and enterprise development. The Youth Development Act of 2007, which concentrated on education, research and human resources, had led to the establishment of the National Youth Consultative Council and the Malaysian Institute for Research in Youth Development.

68. On the issue of ageing, he said that older persons constituted 4.3 per cent of the total population in 2005, a proportion that was expected to grow to 9.8 per cent by 2020. Although it was less affected than some developed countries, Malaysia was aware of the socio-economic implications of population ageing and in 1995 had drawn up a National Policy for the Elderly, based on the United Nations Principles for Older Persons; that policy had been followed, in 1998, by an action plan based on a multidisciplinary approach that encouraged the elderly to remain independent and active. The Government had also established a National Advisory and Consultative Council for the

Elderly consisting of representatives from Government agencies, NGOs and prominent individuals. Similar steps had also been taken for disabled persons. On 8 April 2008, Malaysia had become a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and intended to ratify the Convention as soon as the necessary administrative and legislative procedures had been completed.

69. Malaysia stood ready to share its experience on the matter with the relevant bodies of the United Nations system and the Member States.

70. **Mr. Alakhder** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Poverty, illiteracy and disease were the main obstacles to social development, particularly in Africa, where the rate of youth unemployment and the rates of maternal and infant mortality were increasing because of epidemics, famine and extreme poverty. In that context, his delegation called on the international community, financial institutions and donors to honour the commitments entered into at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in the Millennium Declaration and at the end of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

71. Since the 1970s, his country had put in place social development programmes and projects focused on young people, who were key to development. The participants in the National Youth Forum, held in 2007, had adopted several recommendations aimed at encouraging the participation of young people in political life and decision-making and at creating jobs for young men and women, in particular through small and medium-sized enterprises.

72. In Africa, a project for combating poverty, unemployment and disease had been launched in 2006 in order to encourage investment in the youth employment sector. His Government was also funding various projects aimed at promoting development in Africa and was providing food and medicine to the victims of disasters. It was also financing programmes designed to achieve the objectives established at the World Assembly on Ageing held in Madrid, as well as shelters for the elderly and the homeless.

73. His country had become a party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 and supported United Nations efforts to relaunch the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

74. **Ms. Zhang** Dan (China) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. While welcoming the considerable progress made in the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, she noted the persistence of imbalances among different regions. Most countries lacked the resources to collect data and conduct the research necessary, and her delegation called on all countries to intensify their efforts and invest more financial and human resources in such work.

75. Around the world, 700 million adults, two thirds of whom were women, were illiterate and more than 70 million children did not receive school education. China welcomed the activities of UNESCO relating to the United Nations Literacy Decade and appealed to all Governments to coordinate their efforts in that regard. Conscious of the role it had to play as the world's most populous country, China had promulgated a national law in 1986 making it compulsory to receive nine years of education. Her Government had set up an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism to combat illiteracy, while local governments had established their own institutions, and mechanisms for accountability, inspection and verification had also been established at the national and local levels. Children from vulnerable families received free textbooks and monthly stipends. Thanks to 22 years of effort, China was guaranteeing its population free access to high-quality education. The next step was to improve the level of literacy among women and ethnic minorities in order to halve illiteracy by 2015.

76. China welcomed the entry into force on 3 May 2008 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which it had ratified on 26 June 2008. Nonetheless, Governments should raise public awareness of the rights of the 650 million persons with disabilities throughout the world, who continued to face various problems relating to social security, education, employment and integration. The Paralympic Games in Beijing, which had brought together more than 4,000 athletes representing 146 countries, had played a crucial role in that regard, and had also prompted large-scale renovation of public transport facilities, tourist sites and shopping centres in Beijing in order to facilitate access for the disabled and

to create employment relating to that sector of the population. Disabled people had thus been able to reassert their dignity and self-confidence.

77. **Mr. Hojem** (Norway), speaking as the youth representative of Norway, said that children and young people living in conflict zones were a particularly vulnerable and unprotected group, for whom education, which was a basic right, could provide a framework of security and stability. However, in conflict situations, schools closed down, young people were recruited to the army or militias, and many were forced to flee their homes. Humanitarian aid was often limited to providing food, medicine and shelter for refugees and displaced persons. Universal access to quality primary education was an essential goal, but secondary education must also be supported. It was vital to train teachers, health professionals and engineers in order to ensure post-conflict reconstruction and recovery, but it was regrettable that education was sometimes used as a pretext for teaching intolerance, racism and xenophobia.

78. Although Governments were increasingly aware of the central role of education in crisis situations, they were reluctant to allocate funds to education as part of humanitarian aid. Education programmes were therefore often underfunded or non-existent. Norway urged all Member States to fulfil their commitments, in particular those set out in the Millennium Development Goals and the UNESCO Education for All initiative, and to increase funding for children and young people in conflict zones. Education programmes for young people in conflict situations should meet international minimum standards such as those established by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, and girls should enjoy the same opportunities as boys throughout their education. Norway therefore urged all Member States to include young people as participants in post-conflict political and economic processes.

79. **Ms. Ranki** (Finland), speaking as a youth representative of her country, said that Finland associated itself with the statement made by France on behalf of the European Union. Young people were important to society, which should ensure their growth into responsible citizenship and adulthood while recognizing their role in world development and their right of access to joint resources. Affected as they were by unemployment, poverty, environmental problems and such diseases as HIV/AIDS, young people were one of the most marginalized groups and everyone's responsibility.

80. Being young was a rewarding time of life, but it could also be hard, particularly for girls, who were victims of violence and discrimination. Governments must therefore cooperate at the international level in protecting girls and young women from all forms of violence, and every Member State should adopt a national action programme to combat domestic violence. Men should have a role in such initiatives and, while offenders should be held accountable, efforts should also be made to develop positive male role models.

81. Every year, five million women between the ages of 15 and 19 had abortions, 40 per cent of them in unsafe conditions. They were generally ill-informed about HIV/AIDS-related issues, although the best way of preventing unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases was the dissemination of proper information and the provision of social services.

82. Universal and equal access to primary education was of the utmost importance for development, and yet 65 million girls still remained out of school. Girls must also have access to all employment opportunities and should be encouraged to participate in traditionally male-dominated sectors, while men should be urged to assume greater responsibility in the home.

83. To overcome stereotypes and discrimination, support should be given to the efforts of Governments and international and non-governmental organizations, particularly youth organizations, to promote the equality and participation of girls in society, for human rights applied to all persons equally. Women represented half the world population; without gender parity, the Millennium Development Goals and the objectives of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond could not be achieved.

84. **Mr. Rey** (Switzerland) said that, in the current context of globalization, the employment and education of young people had a crucial part to play in ensuring the stability of society. Since, for some years, there had been no significant drop in youth unemployment worldwide, it was a matter of urgency to take steps to address that scourge, which cost young people, their parents and their country dearly. Moreover, young people without work were easy prey for all kinds of extremism; they could thereby be led to disrupt social peace, which was the key to prosperity.

All Member States should take the measures set out in the World Programme of Action. While there was low unemployment in Switzerland, efforts still needed to be made in that connection, in particular to reduce the number of unemployed in the immigrant population.

85. One of the solutions to unemployment hinged on education, which had to be made accessible to everyone and not just to a happy few, as was the case in some countries. Providing education for the future generation was a means of ensuring a country's prosperity, the security of the older generation and a better life for everyone. All young people should therefore benefit from it, without discrimination, as was required by an egalitarian, free and democratic society. Swiss youth, like young people the world over, fervently wished to be part of the solution and not part of the problem, and Switzerland had put measures in place to encourage them to embark on professional life, for example through internships, and had introduced a scholarship scheme and language courses for immigrant children.

86. Intergenerational dialogue was essential for constructive, egalitarian decision-making and for determining the needs of young people and of society. It was regrettable that there were so few youth representatives at the current session, as compared with 2005. Fresh efforts must be made, by young people and Member States alike; his delegation encouraged them to give the best of themselves, for the sake of today's generation and that of tomorrow.

87. **Mr. Ramadan** (Lebanon) reaffirmed his country's attachment to the Copenhagen Programme of Action and to the international development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. Stability, security and justice were sine qua non conditions for social equality. Like other countries, Lebanon was seeking to ensure the social and economic integration of young people, women, disabled persons and the elderly through assistance and development programmes, but notwithstanding its sustained efforts, the objectives set at the Copenhagen Summit were still far from being achieved.

88. International cooperation, based on partnerships with donor countries, was essential. However, the gap was widening between rich and poor, between developed countries and developing countries, and the fruits of economic development were not enjoyed by those most in need. Employment played a crucial role in poverty eradication and in social integration and stability. A remedy must therefore be found to such problems as foreign debt, the deterioration of education and the decline in productivity, in the knowledge that economic growth alone could not ensure the attainment of the goals set. Financial assistance from developed countries was therefore essential.

89. Globalization had led to some economic growth, which did not however benefit all developing countries. Efforts had to be made to create conditions conducive to social development, eliminate factors of instability and put an end to blockade policies, in particular. Israel's occupation of Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian Arab territories impeded the efforts of the populations concerned to achieve development and dignity, for their right to development and to decent work was being ignored.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.